



SENATOR

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E-Newsletter - 10th District

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10th Legislative District

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2009 LEGISLATURE — WEEK EIGHT

Monday was the last day to pass bills out of fiscal committees in the Senate, and since then we've been spending our days in the Senate chamber voting on bills that have made it through the committee process.

What does this mean?

Well, between now and March 12 we'll be voting on bills that do all sorts of things — sometimes fixing technical glitches in existing laws and sometimes big-picture things like balancing the budget.

Before I give you a brief description of some of my bills that have passed the Senate this week, I'd like to invite you to attend an event...

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

It's difficult to get away from Olympia when the Legislature is in session, but I'm eager to spend some time in our community to discuss important issues with my constituents.

That's why I'll be hosting two Town Hall Meetings on Saturday, March 21. I would like to be able to host more than these two, but because of time constraints, I had to narrow it down to two locations — one on Whidbey Island and one on the mainland. During these meetings I'll give a brief rundown of the bills moving through the Legislature that are locally important as well as provide an overview of the state budget situation, followed by a question-and-answer session during which I hope to get valuable feedback to consider during the remainder of the 2009 Session.

The first event will begin at 10 a.m. in the Stanwood Middle School Cafeteria at [9405 271st Street NW](#).

An afternoon event will begin at 2 p.m. in the Coupeville Recreation Hall at [901 N. Alexander Street](#).

I hope I will see you there!

THE BUDGET - HELPING OUR NEIGHBORS

A huge portion of our state operating budget goes towards something that is generally described as "human services" — which is better described as "helping people."

Even in these tough times it's easy to forget that there are people who — for a variety of reasons — need some form of public assistance to get by. Very few of them are totally dependent on public services — many need specific assistance such as medical assistance or mental health.

How many people in our communities get some form of help from Washington's [Department of Social & Health Services](#)?

More than you probably think.

The area I represent has a population of just over 130,000 people, of which almost 30,000 receive some form of assistance from DSHS.

That's 22 percent of our friends and neighbors who rely on us to help out with programs that include:

- ? Aging & Adult Services
- ? Alcohol & Substance Abuse
- ? Children's Services
- ? Developmental Disabilities
- ? Economic Services
- ? Juvenile Rehabilitation
- ? Medical Assistance
- ? Mental Health Services
- ? Vocational Rehabilitation

Something else that might surprise you is who relies on these services like these.

The [Washington State Department of Health](#) has a program to provide supplemental nutrition called the [Women, Infants & Children Nutrition Program](#) (WIC).

Most of the nearly 300,000 women and children who receive this assistance in our state come from working families, and many are in military families stationed here in Washington.

In fact, right here in our community, one third of the people that get help from this program are in military families. That's 1,834 military members and dependents that our tax dollars are helping out by providing supplemental nutrition.

And helping these people actually helps our entire community in ways that might not seem obvious.

For example, more than \$1.5 million of the assistance provided to these families flows back into our economy when WIC checks are used to purchase food at local grocery stores.

Unfortunately, the current budget situation may require cuts to programs like these — exactly at a time when the economic situation makes these programs more vital than ever. I believe this program is incredibly important, and will do my best to keep the funding for this and the other programs that offer stability to our working families.

BUDGET CALCULATOR

The Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program (LEAP) has created a tool to help understand some of the potential decisions that might be considered as part of the process of developing a balanced state omnibus

operating budget. I have previously sent out a smaller scale budget calculator; this tool provides an extensive look into the real decisions needed to balance our state's budget.

LEAP provides extraordinary service to the state. I am a member of the LEAP committee and I can say with authority after working with this extraordinary staff that I am so pleased to see the great work they have done on this. This is a good example of government working with you to allow you to be part of the process.

Visit the LEAP webpage at <http://fiscal.wa.gov/Budgets.aspx> and click on the "Links" tab on the upper right-hand side of the page to find the "Budget Balancing Tool for Citizens." I encourage you to try out this tool and let me know how you did!

Please note that the tool represents only the "Near General Fund-State" within the Omnibus Operating Budget. The authors of the tool did not intend to model details of the Transportation and Capital Budgets.

TRANSPORTATION STIMULUS PACKAGE & ALASKAN WAY VIADUCT REPLACEMENT

As the chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, one of my responsibilities is to work with my colleagues to decide on the best way to manage our transportation dollars. This year the task includes figuring out the best way to ensure that Washington's share of the Federal Stimulus Highway Funds can best be used for highway preservation and maintenance projects that create jobs.

Preparing a project list that includes highway projects all over the state is a challenging task, but this week we managed to get it done in record time to make sure that our state's share of Federal Stimulus Highway Funds will put our citizens to work as quickly as possible.



On Wednesday, just hours after receiving it from the House of Representatives, the Senate passed [House Bill 1978](#), which included the list of \$344 million worth of "shovel-ready" transportation projects throughout the state that will receive federal stimulus funding. The governor signed the bill into law on Thursday — within 24 hours of it passing the Legislature — opening the way for transportation stimulus funds to begin putting people to work on [highway maintenance and safety projects all over our state](#).

The Senate also passed [Senate Bill 5768](#) to designate a deep-bore tunnel as the design to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

This legislation includes provisions to ensure that state funding can only be used to build a replacement tunnel and to remove the existing viaduct structure — not for central seawall or waterfront promenade improvements — and that the City of Seattle will be responsible for all utility relocation costs associated with the project.

SB 5768 also includes specific language to limit the state's financial obligation to the project and ease concerns of potential cost overruns being passed on to taxpayers statewide. The project finance plan will include no more than \$2.4 billion in state funds that were already budgeted in a previous session for this project, and must also include at least \$400 million in toll revenue.

SENATE APPROVES LOCAL HOSPITAL BILL

This week the Senate passed my bill to allow for the creation of voter approved Public Hospital Capital Facility Areas (PHCFA) in Island and San Juan Island counties to generate funds for public health facilities.

[Senate Bill 5354](#) addresses the need to expand a local health clinic on Camano Island by allowing the local community that's being served by the clinic to vote on the issue themselves.

Under this bill, a community can place a measure to create a PHCFA before voters when the county receives a petition from at least 10 percent of voters in the district who voted in the last general election and with approval of the county commission.

The process requires that two proposals be put before the voters in a general or special election: The first would create the PHCFA, and the second would establish funding for it. Both would need to be approved for the PHCFA to be created.

I think that communities like ours need to become more self-reliant when it comes to health-care, and this bill allows the people to decide, at the local level, if they want to make something like an expansion of the Camano Health Clinic happen.

MAIL-IN REBATES AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Some people who apply for a mail-in rebate after buying something have to send it in right away, but end up waiting months for the rebate check to arrive — and that's just not fair.

After all, as Gary Sorensen of Stanwood pointed out to me, it shouldn't take dozens of weeks to get a \$50 rebate check for a new cell phone when an auto dealer can process and give a rebate of several thousand dollars at the time of purchasing a vehicle.

Some companies may be hanging onto rebate money a lot longer than they need to, and sometimes the consumers have been waiting so long that they simply forget they're owed a rebate. When it finally shows up it can be mistaken for junk-mail and tossed out, meaning the check never gets cashed and the company keeps money the consumer is entitled to.

That's why I sponsored [Senate Bill 5978](#) to establish clearer guidelines for promotional mail-in rebates. It allows consumers at least 14 days from the date of purchasing a product to apply for a rebate, and says rebates must be sent within 90 days. If the rebate is a check, it must be mailed in a way that identifies the piece of mail as an anticipated rebate.

The bill passed the Senate today on a unanimous vote and now proceeds to the House of Representatives for consideration.

HELPING FARMERS AND FISHERMEN

The Senate has recently passed several pieces of legislation that I've sponsored to help enable local farmers and fishermen to market their goods directly to consumers.

Under a 2003 law, chicken producers may obtain permits from the Department of Agriculture for the slaughter and sale of 1,000 or fewer chickens per year directly to the ultimate consumer at the producer's farm – but they didn't include ducks or turkeys, which is a little foul and definitely not fair.

That's why I sponsored [Senate Bill 5350](#) to allow the producers of turkeys and ducks to sell directly to the public just like chicken producers can. It's an idea that the Senate approved this week that will give more small-scale poultry producers the ability to provide a greater variety of product directly to consumers.

Some commercial fishermen face a similar situation by having to cut through red tape to sell their catch, so I sponsored [Senate Bill 5356](#) to allow a wider range of commercial fishing operations to obtain the Direct Retail Endorsement needed to clean, dress, and sell seafood directly to consumers. This idea to provide a valuable opportunity for increasing commerce at the local level and broaden consumer access to fresh seafood was unanimously approved by the Senate this week.

Of course, no report on agriculture bills would be complete without an update on [Senate Bill 5797](#), which would ease regulatory restrictions on the use of food byproducts in anaerobic digesters that run primarily on cow manure.

Last year the Legislature gave these amazing machines a boost last year by providing farmers a six year property and leasehold excise tax exemption to farmers who invest in machines called anaerobic digesters to recover methane from animal manure for producing electricity, heat and hot water.

This year, we're on track to allow farmers to make the process even more efficient by easing Department of Ecology regulations to allow manure to be "co-digested" with food waste in anaerobic digesters. **SB 5797** was passed by the Senate with broad bipartisan support and is now being considered by the House.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR FAMILIES

A Senate plan that amounts to a housing, family security and jobs stimulus for Washington families passed this week and is now headed to the House.

[Senate Bill 5452](#), sponsored by Sen. Claudia Kauffman of Kent boosts the capacity of the state's Housing Finance Commission to issue bonds for home construction for first-time or middle-income homebuyers. The bonds are not tied to the state budget and aren't state debt because the commission acts as a conduit between private lenders, the federal government and consumers.

In total, bond issuances from the commission have pumped more than \$22 billion into the state's economy. Sen. Kauffman's measure adds \$5 billion in capacity for the commission to authorize construction of new single-family homes and apartment buildings. That means construction jobs, material sales and homes for families who can achieve the chance of home ownership with just a little help.

HEALTH CARE COSTS

The Senate took a bold step this week to reign in out of control health care administrative costs. Currently, administration eats up 30-to-40 cents of every U.S. health care dollar. [Senate Bill 5346](#), also known as the **Health Care Efficiency Act**, requires the state insurance commissioner to designate one or more lead organizations to coordinate the development of processes, guidelines and standards to streamline health care administration.

The long-term goals include enabling providers and payers to go to a single source to obtain information about a patient's health insurance, covered benefits and cost-sharing, and standardizing medical management processes, including web-based procedures and forms, for authorizing services.

NEAH BAY RESPONSE TUG

The [Neah Bay Response Tug](#) has assisted more than 40 commercial vessels that lost rudder control or propulsion or otherwise found themselves in situations where they were in danger of running aground. Although everyone agrees the tug is essential to maritime safety and environmental protection, funding this necessary service has always been difficult.

Part-time seasonal operations have been funded by state and federal programs since 1999, and the state has provided funding for full-time service since July 2008 — but with tax dollars in short supply, the legislature believes that it's time for the cost of funding the Neah Bay Response Tug should be placed on the organizations that pose the risk instead of the taxpayers.

This week, the legislature passed [Senate Bill 5344](#) to require that all oil tankers, cargo vessels and large cruise ships form a cooperative to contract for standby response tug service at the mouth of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

The bill has gained widespread support from around the state, including the unanimous support of all 39 Washington counties through the Washington State Association of Counties, tribes, industry, and numerous environmental organizations.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

My executive assistant Nova Gattman, legislative assistant Gina Bull and intern Beau Perschbacher are available to provide constituent services to the people of our community, so please feel free to contact us with questions or concerns — whether they involve bills before the Legislature or topics you feel are being overlooked.

You can reach me by [e-mail](#) or call my office in Olympia at **360-786-7618**. If you have a concern, I want to hear it.

In the meantime, please visit my [web page](#) for up-to-date info on what's happening at the Legislature. I post regular updates — including video — onto my blog, and it's far more information than we'd want to put into a weekly update like this.

Until next week — Take Care!

Thank you for reading my email newsletter. I appreciate your interest in the legislative process. If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?member=haugenm> to remove your name from the list.

Washington Senate Democratic Caucus